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Four Quarters





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Four Quarters

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Marginalia . . .

FOR AULD LANG SYNE

If you're tired of taxes and energy crises, ride with me now to those thrilling days of yesteryear. I seem to have reached the age where it's more fun to look backward than forward, and have begun this new year with a remembrance of things past: things that used to be, are not that way any more, and seem likely never to be again.

If you remember the opening lines of this piece—"ride with me to those thrilling days of yesteryear"—you cannot say them aloud without hearing the William Tell Overture and thinking, "Who was that Masked Man?" The Lone Ranger was only one of the high spots of my week in those days when radio drama had the power to make my imagination soar. Years later I learned the names of "Valse Triste" and "Flight of the Bumble Bee," but those melodies really exist for me only as the introductory themes of "I Love a Mystery" and "The Green Hornet."

I have never bought any of those nostalgia records of old radio programs; perhaps I'd rather not find out that they were not as good as I remember them. But I lament the loss of the radio play with its ability to stretch the imagination of the listener, making a stage limited only by the mind itself. A stab of music, footsteps, a scuffle, a scream, a door slamming, the sound of footsteps running, a police whistle—and a scene had been created in the imagination without a word of dialogue. I remember pulling over to the side of the road once to listen to the conclusion of an NBC Short Story dramatization of Wilbur Daniel Steele's "How Beautiful With Shoes." I was too absorbed to drive. My imagination had been caught, and I wanted to give myself fully to the experience. I could never have that reaction to television. It's too literal. What you see is what there is; it is all there is. The image is right in front of you, and it is limited by the production budget and the size of your set. Give me "Raymond your host" and the squeaking door of the Inner Sanctum anytime.

Maybe television is to blame for some of the other things we've lost too. Unless you live in Chicago, you can't know the pleasure of sitting in the sun on a Wednesday afternoon, leisurely watching a baseball game. On a weekday, there were only the kids and the real baseball fans, not the busloads of people who come on weekends to guzzle beer and vent their frustrations

(Continued on Page 39)

Out There

(For Robert L. Welker)

H. E. FRANCIS

"I HEARD your father last night, Wilson," the dean said.

"My father?" Beyond the corridor the quadrangle froze green. Against the sun he could scarcely see the dean's face.

"A great lecture. 'Where a man lives.' You certainly come by your talents honestly. But didn't *you* hear him?"

The pines by the chemistry building, spires of green, quivered.

"But I never knew him."

"Never?"

"He died when I was a baby. I'm virtually an orphan. My mother brought me up." But he faltered, watching the lie settle in the form of a sparrow high in the pine. *Abandoned, but at least I've got his name.*

"That's hard to believe! Why, he's the spit and image of you. And your name a foot high at the old Civic. You're sure?"

"No," he said—too rapidly, but laughed.

"Obviously!" Dean McCullough laughed with him. "Too bad you can't hear him anyway, but he's off to Emory tonight. Well—" He shook hands. "Have a good summer in Spain."

At the Humanities exit, the blazing lawn made the quad rise in a quick sea in his vision, like the Sound at home. He blinked it serene. Why *home*? Sun gripped his head. He was so tired—steeped in the degree too long—but sometimes the buildings seemed to dissolve, trees sink, the earth fall away.

He crossed the quad in a hot inundation of pine. Helen was waiting. "At Holly's Grill," he murmured aloud, because he *drifted* so. The least movement hooked his eye. He halted. *My father?* Did moments lie like objects waiting around certain corners to confront you at critical times, as if by design? For faces intruded; they fought the day; his head followed them—his grandfather, Joseph K, John of the Cross, Quentin, Felipe II, Ivan Karamazov—to Moscow, Hades Castille, Yoknapatawpha . . . *No not now.* Grimly he set his eyes on Holly's Grill.

And there was Helen solid as truth behind the pane. She waved. He ran as the light turned red.

"You just made that one," she said. He slid into the booth, laughing, feeling his skull reverberate.

"You're sure keyed up." Her hands touched his. "And why not? Tomorrow at this time—oh, David, at last—we'll be on our way. A week with Mom and Dad and—"

But he was staring at her hand. His own crept over it. "Tomorrow?"

"David!" she cried with such a pitch of apprehension that he jerked. "*Now* what is it?" He looked into hard, hurt eyes.

His own eyes palpitated, she was talking from a long way off, and perilously a corridor opened. He said, "Dean McCullough—"

"Dean McCullough? He's on *leave*."

"He saw my father."

"Your *father*? David, you're not going to start *that* again?"

"Start what? What?"

"And on the day before we leave. Please, David."

"He said he was the image of me, the same name." There was a billboard with his own head.

"That doesn't mean a *thing*, David. There must be thousands of Wilsons."

"But only one father."

"Don't look that way. You should *see* yourself!"

He felt sorry for her—she was afraid—and touched her cheek.

"I'm sorry, Helen." But his gaze wandered over her shoulder, beyond.

"You are *not* sorry. I know you. You think I don't remember?"

Once he had holed up in a cheap hotel in Dubuque, calling every Wilson in the directory; and once he had been gone a week, scouring St. Louis for a man he'd never known. But he had a right to claim that other flesh, hadn't he? Oh, no, Helen would have none of that. "You don't owe him a thing. What'd he do but abandon you? If you drop your work and pop off at every clue, how'll you get through prelims?" And she was right; she finally did get him through the Ph. D.

"I know what you're feeling, David, but—" Her voice pulled. "We're free now."

Free?

"Dave . . .?"

He was not used to such urgency in her. She managed food,

rent, extra books, pleasure—by watching. And she had patience, seldom mentioned marriage, and never directly. Only the sight of children made something in her halt; a glaze—to ward off pain?—shielded her and rapidly she channeled her excitement, vagrant over Boston Brahmins, Emerson, the Transcendentalists, though at times she would halt to look back.

"You won't be satisfied, will you, David? Not till you find out *he* doesn't want you. Then you'll come back. Well, I won't be your mother and father too. I'm *Helen*."

"Not *here*, Helen." For the waitress interrupted, a quick acrid odor. "Nothing," he told her.

All the way to the apartment Helen's silence accused. Heat clutched his head. Once inside, she drew the shades. "David, not this time—you wouldn't?" she whispered, kissing his mouth, cheek, ear, drawing him down. "Please?" But somewhere in the shadows, across a meadow, a dark thin post of a man was calling, a voice reached after him into the woods, where he was lifting rocks for garter snakes he liked to collect. He ran out of the woods into sudden sky, through the swamp of purple iris to dry ground and islands of forget-me-nots and over the brook where he caught frogs. The man's arms stretched out to catch him.

"DavidDavidDavid," Helen moaned ecstatically as he leaped into his father's arms.

He fell away, but Helen clung, whispering, "Promise, David. Hon?" whispering into slow sleep. But he could not speak; he would not belie the sign from the dean. *And last January I saw Kohoutek—like a herald.* His heart soared ahead with it. In the next apartment time struck the quarter hour. *Go go go go*, nine times echoing his decision. He got up and finished his half-packed suitcase. Then he closed himself in the bathroom, feeling a coward—but he dared not wake her, she would find a way to stop him—and wrote *I'd stay if I could, but I must stop feeling suspended. I want to know the reality I came from and what I belong to. Go to Spain. Sell what you want when you come back. Remember: We decided NO OBLIGATIONS, but don't think I'm not ashamed. If I weren't, I'd wake you. Maybe my shame's the measure of how deep the other is in me—nothing else is real when that presence overwhelms me. I seem to become someone else. My imagination comes so alive! I can't describe properly what happens inside me then. Maybe that's hell—being trapped in feelings you can't communicate. I want to share, but I turn to stone then. I don't know how long this will go on, but I can't put you through that again. Forgive me. David.*

At Trailways three men and a woman were sitting still as islands, one man with his arms hung, mouth wide in sleep. All the years gray heads had called his eyes. "Keep it up and you'll be on one wild goose chase after another," Helen had said. He was relieved when the bus pulled out, but he felt his betrayal of her. He saw her lying alone, blurring into the anonymous dusk. *I can't help it, Helen. Can you imagine what it is to see someone pass and be suddenly impaled by the thought that he's part of your own body?*

One Fourth of July when he was a boy, a woman came to the front door. Something walked on his heart: Memory knew her from a time when uncles had milled about, when he used to eat with her and sleep in her bed—his father's mother. So he hid in his bedroom.

But his mother shadowed the doorway.

"Your grandmother's here. She wants to see you."

"I don't want to see her." He wanted to cry from fury, yet he moved forward. She was standing far in the parlor, small and round and dark in the sun.

"Don't you remember your grandmother?" Already her pudgy hands clenched his fingers, thick fragrance seeped over him. "Why, his hands are sweating. You're nervous!"

No no no, they're always wet.

"We came to town for the parade. He just thought he might see his son."

"Not here," his mother said.

"Would you like to go with your grandmother—just for a little while?" the woman said.

"No!" he cried. "No!"

The woman's voice was filled with energy, her laughter infectious. She talked with his mother. They seemed to forget the man. And he was glad when she finally left. But why had she left the room so empty?

"Helen," he'd said, "listen: After she left I spent the whole day on the Common—there were thousands of people there—and once I *knew* my father was behind me. I turned around: He *was* standing with his back to me, slim and straight as in the photos, with sleek dark hair. I wanted to say *Dad* and touch him. I was afraid and sweating and wanted to cry. I hated him for not turning around, but when he moved, I ran—Can you understand that?—I ran all the way to the woods and stayed till dark and the sky got white with the bonfire a mile away. Then I decided to go back, swearing *This time I'll go right up to him, I will*. But I couldn't find him. I've never been so close

since."

Until now.

Far, Atlanta made a golden dome warding off the dark.
If my father is there . . .

When he stepped off the bus, a subterranean cold swept up the passage, his heart gripped, a dark cold corridor came, someone was calling *Felipe*, he was standing in the Escorial. But who were all these people? He wanted to turn on them: *What are you doing here in my palace?* But the tower clock struck. It was time for his devotions: He fled up the stairs, past the pilgrims, through the cloisters to his private chambers. The bed he had just crept out of was unmade. Gold light poured through his little window above the *altar mayor*. He fell to his knees to pray. Below, candles burned gold; a smell of stone and wax and incense, damp tapestries, smote. His place in the choir was empty. He closed his eyes. *O my Father, I am sick with longing. My body clings to this place, but my soul leaps to you. Forgive my vanity. Accept this my tomb and palace and monastery, and forgive my errors for this my beloved Spain. And, O Lord, do not ease the pain in my body that makes you ever present. Let my soul grow large feeding on this my dying body. Let my bed reek and the air give back my own stench that I may be ever mindful of Thee.*

"Move it, man."

"What?" He was on the escalator; it ran into the waiting room gleaming around him.

"You're blocking the way." The man heeled his suitcase aside.

Atlanta, he said to himself, *Atlanta*.

Outside, he told the cab driver, "Emory University." On the street were hoards of pilgrims. *You fool!* His throat made an absurd little laugh.

"What?"

"Nothing. It sure changes. I was a student here."

The city was higher, stone burgeoned into sky, walls drove the eyes upward.

They followed his old way: along Peachtree, turning at the Fox, down Ponce de Leon past the fruit stand, the joints, Sears, the Church of Christ, where they'd called him *Brother*. At Manuel's Delicatessen somebody would be playing the pianola. A dank breeze flowed through the tunnel of leaves. Far, a choir was singing. They wound the way into Druid Hills.

"Left—the Student Union."

"You sure know your way."

"I got my M. A. here. It's home."

The Union lights were on, but the doors locked. He couldn't be too late! But a wide strip over the billboard read CANCELLED, leaving the top of the lecturer's head and half his name, *son*. He tried to tear the strip, but it was glued fast. *No, not again.*

He went directly to the Union desk. "The lecture—what happened?"

"The speaker had an attack in Alabama. They flew him to Chicago."

"But I've got to see him."

"There's a refund. And we've an address if you want to contact him."

"Address?" His blood halted.

The boy copied it out.

"A hospital then?"

"His home, I think. By the way, you're not Mr. Wilson?"

No. He's my— He felt a bone in his lungs. "Yes."

"A woman called long distance. She said to expect you. Her name's—"

"Helen . . ."

"Say, you psychic? Helen Riddle. She said the agency would refund your travel ticket in care of your old address, unless you'd changed your mind."

Was she finally swearing off, or was it her way of loving, even now?

"Do you have a room? I'm an alumnus."

"I can just make it."

He reserved a morning flight to Chicago and bathed, but throbbing with the Trailways trip, he walked the campus. Through dark trees lights blinked from the hospital, dorms, library. Up fountained memories of Pike parties, field trips, soccer, the apartment . . . Soon he came to the depot: Those rails went north to the sea where he was born. Waves rushed into his head. The dark whispered.

"Here?" a voice said.

"What?" he said.

There was a brushing, a leap of face from the shadows—so familiar!—and a boy drew a girl quickly after him. Ah, to leave his skin and be that boy! But he went back. Lying there on his old campus, he felt younger, as if Helen hadn't happened yet; and such a yearning came into him that he hardly slept.

On the plane he was nervous and tired; his eyes seized the least shadow. On the train west to DeKalb, the suburbs tore

dizzily, cornfields poured through his skull, shadows flagged; and he felt such a pulling *back*. At the DeKalb station, still a drab whistle-stop, his direction was certain. He laughed, hurrying into this terrible familiarity. 422! *Yes*. How could he have forgotten that number? He'd lived there: a two-story white Thirties frame house, renovated, a picture window where he'd read on winter afternoons. His legs felt splintered, but he gained the porch and rang the bell—its sound took his breath.

"Mrs. Bulgarov!" The door filled with that heap of flesh.

David!" Her mouth sucked his cheek. "Why you didn't tell us? Papa! Girls! Such pla-sure!"

"Home." He was bewildered giddy by so much joy.

"Always your room's waiting," Mama said. "We never rented yet since you're gone. Always we said, 'David loves pita. The smell's bringing him back.' And I made pita this day!" She let out a series of high pitches.

"And why you come DeKalb?" the old man said. The eye burnt from hot metal in the Chi factory still squinted, but the other glowed a clear dark sun.

"I'm in Chicago for an interview—just for the day, but I couldn't resist—" The stairs called to his eyes.

"See, Papa! What I tell? Not write, but like son to us. Mara, take bag upstairs."

"No," he said with quickened laughter, already ascending. "Let me. I can't wait to see my old room." But there was nothing there, only himself in the old mirror.

Mama called, "You come now. We eat pita." She was telling them, "David came to door the first day with two eyes only; then one day comes downstairs with glasses. 'Why hiding?' I cry. 'Where's David?' Such good times! And now finished all education? Good! We celebrate. Wine? Beer, Whiskey? Papa!"

They made him tell all. The afternoon ebbed. Dusk thickened the trees. The girls' eyes admired.

"And that girl—Helen, yes? See, Papa!" Her arm pressed warmly. "I'm glad. You never regret. And empty house next door waiting for our boy."

"Waiting for me?" Afternoon light etched white crypts in the vacant house beyond.

"Sure. You get job, marry, live here. Is Paradise to marry. What more? Eh, Papa?" Her laughter scaled the chandelier and fed Papa's and the girls' and his own: For his head reeled, bobbed—with the wine, no sleep—their voices echoed down corridors. Surely it wasn't real. Not *now*—*was*. But he couldn't blink them away. *But how'd I get here? I'm looking for my*

father.

"Excuse me." He went up to the bath. His frenzied hands went through the wallet—for that address. Pine Street, yes, but *Knoxville, Tennessee!* He couldn't wait. He must leave, now, *now*.

Downstairs he told them, "I could stay forever in this good house." How he wanted to say *I have a family—in Knoxville*. But there's somebody . . ." His hand went—out there.

"*Hel-en*. What I tell!"

"Helen," he murmured. In the graying deeps outside, he could conjure no face, nothing of Helen. *Mama, I feel sometimes on the edge of a precipice poised for the longest flight*. Papa and the girls held him, reluctant to let him go.

"When you come again?" Mama's eyes shone black with farewell. Her voice lamented *Never*.

He finally stumbled off—"Bye. Thanks"—back to the depot, to Chicago, back, back— His still self glided along beside him in the pane. Wires, houses, lights went through him. And on the plane, a star straight out palpitated with his own heart; his bones wanted to reach through his image and touch that light. Helen would fly to Spain, astronauts reach into another orbit, and everywhere things made milkweed spurrings upward. "*But, Helen, why such despair in the moment of falling, when such frenzy only the moment before?*"

"*You silly. We're animals—and then some. We wouldn't despair if we weren't, would we? But let both be together, can't you? Remember 'Fair needs foul'? Who can keep up one without the other for long? Isn't your memory good enough to tide you over?*"

Memory? "*Sometimes I forget who I am, Helen.*"

"*Because you have such an exceptional faculty for feeling into somebody else.*"

"*How'd you know that?*"

"*I've seen you steep yourself in all that transcendent literature, and I love you— Remember? And that's why you need me—to tell you who you are. I'm the straightest way!*"

But over his desk hung St. John's words,: Take care that you always choose not the easiest, but the hardest . . ."

In Spain, in the Carmelite monastery of Toledo, he saw the cell where they had imprisoned St. John of the Cross for trying to reform the Order. The guide said, "If you want to see what the poor *padre* lived in for almost nine months, *adelante*." So he went into the dark hole—ten by six with not enough room to stand, and no windows or light or air. "*Asi—*

like that"—with the door shut. Darkness. Silence. Damp cold stone. *Juan*. For that instant walled in, he lay in Juan's flesh; someone was calling from a far place. He strained, listening . . . My name?

But the stewardess intervened. "Knoxville . . ."

He sat the long black night out at the airport. Once outside, the morning world gripped: Kingston Pike, arcades of trees, Ayres Hall on university hill, downtown high on Gay Street, the mountains going beyond. "Here!" he cried to the driver. But *why* here? The brakes pitched nervously. The Court was a horseshoe-shaped building. Old Mr. Waites, nearly too fat to move, would be sitting in his armchair overlooking the campus. He took the elevator up to third and rapped.

But it was a woman, gaunt to a shadow.

"Oh—" Walls gleamed clean beyond. "I roomed with Mr. Waites here." Then, the walls had been drab, a sullied maze through mounds of undusted objects, old Waites' personal archaeology.

"Mr. Waites, I'm afraid, died some years ago. I'm sorry." Cautious, she inched the door to.

Down. The suitcase plagued, this burden he lugged everywhere.

Pine.

"Taxi!"

Straight to Pine.

"What you think of *that*?" the driver said.

422 was gone except for slab steps, a hollow in the earth, and the severed backbone of a chimney!

"Should I wait?"

"No, no. Maybe the neighbors know." And that *was* the address—clearly. Could that boy at Emory have blundered?

The neighbor had been watching from the window.

"I'm looking for the Wilsons." *For my father*. The words, unsaid, hung like absurd furniture in his eyes. "But I've made so many mistakes, I've looked . . ." The man grew wary. "Oh, I'm not a bill collector; I'm a relative."

"Ah. But I never knew them, just he's from Pennsylvania—You from there?—and that property's gone for sale cause the owner's in the hospital."

"How'd you find out?"

"The agent who put up that sign."

"Thanks. That's a great help."

The taxi was waiting. "I've been watching. Figured you wouldn't get far. Where to?"

"Ultimate Realty."

The agent was wary too—and disappointed—when he told him, "I'm not here to buy. I'm a relative."

"Then you ought to know Mr. Wilson's sick—very."

Very? His eyes throbbed, and his temples.

"He went into the Harrisburg hospital—to see a famous specialist there."

"I must find him." and he *would*. He had enough money to get to Harrisburg, some over—and then? He didn't care. His blood thrust at his skull: Close, yet so infinitely far.

By the time he boarded the plane he was so tired, tired, his body sank limbless, his mind numb . . . Far off was a singing—he listened—and footsteps, hoards of footsteps; the organ, the choir, burst forth. *Yes*. He rose, feeling very ill, but urged to review his handiwork. *For you, O God, this monastery of San Lorenzo*. He went through the throne room, following the pilgrims down cloistered corridors, down, down steps damp and cold to a circular room. Who had built this room? *I Felipe did not. It was water and mud*. But now marble and jasper, niches with gray marble sepulchres; and he read the names of kings there, his father's name—and Felipe II, his own! How could that be? And abruptly, at the odor of his living flesh, he turned; his hand, long and thin to his own sight, felt his way up the damp wall, back, up into that sound—How it came louder, louder! to his bedchamber, which he could no longer bear to leave for any time, and down on his knees. He dropped his head, fever-ridden and hot in his hands. The incense and wax could not eradicate his own stench. *O my God, protect my daughter, forgive me my sins, do not deny me, O Father*. Against that cloth harsher than sackcloth his forehead chafed his arm.

His arm jerked. "Your lunch," the stewardess said. His head woke full. Food throbbed bold with sunlight. Jet air rushed through his skull. Serene, the heaven settled around him. Cata-pulted through stillness.

Where is my body going?

Into me, you fool!

Helen?

David, I want your baby—but with your consent. You don't have to marry me. Just let's have a baby, or what else is love for? When do we stop lying, after all the education and facts and history and knowledge of death: a baby's not a mere disconnected happening, darling, but still a miracle and a real live event like you and me in the continuity of things. Why be two more simply screwing ourselves into meaningless oblivion?

Oblivion means. You talk about the paradox of dying into somebody else so that you can let go yet still be here. But why do you resist that?

Because . . . But no word came into his mind.

Perhaps the answer lay down there. Below, the Susquehanna made a brown coil through the green city. In the descent, a membrane slipped down over his ears. His head vibrated.

Outside the hospital, in the last sun leaps of forsythia, bloodbursts of salvia crowded into his head. He halted to let his blood ease, then gripped the suitcase and mounted the steps. Inside, white streaked everywhere; the odors were pungent.

"Wilson?" he said to the gray lady at the cardex, feeling a fool when she said, "We've two. Both *Paul!*" She laughed, but he felt pinned. "Is he young?"

"My father."

"Then it's 313 west. One's a child."

313 west.

He felt foolish carrying his suitcase. The elevator parted on a bright, empty way. For an instant his blood lurched with the motion, and he closed his eyes: Dark corridors extended, a quick subterranean wind came as the elevator closed. His legs trembled but he followed the black arrow down the corridor. He pushed 313 open.

Two bodies were lying in a blaze of sun—the near one young, the other old. He approached the long body under the sheet. The old head hung back, the mouth open, lips dry; the eyelids lay limp in the sockets; sun gleamed along the wet rims; all the skin lay close to bone; a bolt of white hair grew from the skull. From the rotting teeth, the hole and dry tongue came a foul odor. Too old! Why wasn't he younger? *Why?* He wanted to pound that flesh into the right face; he wanted to raise that body up and shake life into it. Instead, he covered his eyes. *Where do I go now?* But when he began to retreat, the man's throat scraped. He stared into that mouth. The tongue lapped.

Suddenly the eyes opened. They fixed on him. They stared so long that he thought *He's dead*. Yet he dared not move. Then the head rose: Sun drove into the man's eyes; they went blue and deep. He drew away, but the man's hands clamped his wrists. His heart bolted. "You came," the old man wheezed. "you!" and smiled, his wet eyes raising the light, which broke and spilled down his cheeks. Who'd the man think he was? Now the old fingers shot up to his collar and drew him to his chest and began to weep; the dry, warm hands moved over his hair and eyes and mouth. He heard the breath in the man's chest

and felt the warm bones; and all at once his own fear and disappointment and despair welled up, and he clutched that frame. "Yes yes yes," he cried, "me!" And both of them wept with all their hearts.

"What?" In the next bed the young man sat up. "Nurse? Nurse?"

In a moment a nurse came.

"What's going on? What are you *doing* to him?" She tried to part the old man's fingers. Still they clutched, impervious to her—until, finally, he fell back exhausted. His eyes closed, but his lips were smiling.

"Look what you've done," she cried.

He rose and backed off and took his suitcase and fled.

"Do you think it was the son?" the young man was saying. "Who else would cry for him like that?"

But that *You* echoed in pursuit down the elevator, through the foyer, outside, where it was growing sunset, hard white clouds edged with dying crimson. Cool wind came. Still he felt those warm hands, the pulsing too rapid in his blood, and in the sky. *You must stop this*. But he could not obliterate the deep sea in the old man's eyes; and he saw his own Sound, the Point, all the Atlantic, and beyond; and he yearned for it. *Yes, go*. The house was there waiting. His mother had said, "After I'm gone, it will always be there when you want it."

He turned to look up to the third floor, where the old man was lying. He wanted to tell him about the town near the tip of the island—"the end of the world," his mother'd say—where he was born, where the air always held sea, where wind carried morning up from the east and "Nearer My God to Thee" from the Episcopal Church tower and the first tatters of darkness and all the seasons, where on clear days you could see to the very edge of things.

I am too near home not to go. Years I have not been.

He would not let up now, but go on to the end.

All the way, tunneling through the Pennsylvania dark to New York and trundling along the battered Long Island rails, he felt he was willing the train home. But there was the haunt of Helen's voice: "You fool, you! Don't you see I'm the only way?"

Way?

Then why did his father beckon always ahead, over her shoulder?

"And where will all this take you?"

"When I find him, Helen, I'll know."

"And when you do, you'll think of me, but you don't know

how bitterly. Remember that."

The train was so slow! It stopped at brief islands of lights, stations of the past more distant as the train recovered his island. He was so close. Surely that house, with the son returned, would draw his father back at last. Maybe he had *been* and the neighbors would bear witness to his presence. And he wanted to hurry, to bear witness before the old man's eyes went out. Perhaps he should have waited with him! But the old man was here; he felt his breath in his ear.

The first glints of light appeared, land narrowed, water encroached in black glimmers. Ahead, the waterfront materialized like a town undersea. The train lurched, wrenched a cry from the rails, and halted on the dock. The town was too real. He could not believe. *Back*. But how far did you have to go?

"Taxi!"

He wanted to recognize the driver's face, but it was a stranger's, though the man's gaze halted on him when he gave the address. The sound of that address from his own mouth startled him. *Home*. A fine ringing ran through his head.

Through the village, the taxi lit a way past the traffic circle and the potato fields and up to the edge—the Sound appeared and deep infinite darkness. Clean, damp night air poured over.

"The last house."

"You're sure this is it?" The driver took the money.

"Sure? It's mine."

"O-kay."

The taxi backed out and dark fell whole, soft with wind; and fine stars of light emerged from the Connecticut shore. *This*. He could walk blind to this house, he knew it so well. But his legs faltered, and he groped for the gate, hanging broken, and nearly tripped—the cement was broken too and uneven—and mounted the stoop to the front door—it swung so easily—and went in, knowing it was empty, years, waiting. For him? Wind swept through broken windows; waves struck the sand below. *Empty*. But he would fill it. "*Never. Not without me, David. I'm the only way.*"

He dropped the suit case. In darkness he roamed from living room to dining room and kitchen; then, taking his suitcase, he went up the stairs, stopping at last at his own room. He could hardly stand, but his blood was alive with the place, his head raced—too fast. Stop, stop!

His eyes grew accustomed: Out the window were the cliffs, the width of sand below, then sea merging with thick, endless

dark. *The house of my fathers.* Empty. He had nothing but the suitcase. He sat on it. His head drifted. Dark corridors opened. *Felipe? Juan? Who?* His head jerked. He stood, this time grasping the casing. His gaze tried to fathom it, encompass the whole dark. And for an instant he was still in the hospital, gazing into the old man's private sea. Was he looking out on this too? His head pulsed with the waves. How far back did you have to go? Into every nook and cranny? Down onto the shore? Into the sea itself finally? He must know. He succumbed to the wind inundating him, aware that in a moment he would be asleep, but not before he made up his mind to stay. He would make something; he would wait here, wait. For surely his father would come.

Too Quick Upon Me

PHILIP K. JASON

The sun sets lower than it should,
I strain my arches for a glimpse;
it hurtles deep into a wood
below a blooming moon that limps,
half-scalded, up the stars, — and me,
I crane my neck and trace the arch,
my hands draw circles wide and free,
conduct the moon into its perch
between the branches of a tree.

Another minute and that moon
will cool the mounting sun, but not
quite put it out. It comes so soon,
though I hold to my precious spot,
alert to every increment of change,
awake to every shadow in the shade.
Yet, I miss something, seconds or an age,
upheaval, bliss, reversal, or slow fade.
Too quick upon me, and then out of range.

The Seed

CAROL ADORJAN

“**W**HAT’S ABORTION mean?” John the inquisitive one. He comes to me, blue eyes wide and unflinching, seeking information.

Usually, I say, *Why do you ask?* It is part of the ritual. I have read somewhere that it is important not to give more answer than the child is ready to receive. Articles and books on child psychology are full of such advice. But no one ever cautions the child not to ask more questions than the mother is ready to answer. I am never ready to answer John’s questions. *Why do some seeds grow into flowers and some into trees?* he asks. *How do airplanes stay up? Where is gravity? If God is invisible, how do we keep from stepping on Him? How does the toilet flush?* They all weigh the same—John’s questions. They bob up, right buoys on a sea of silent observation. And I am never prepared. They fly up before me like birds from the underbrush of our conversation. And I am always startled. To get my bearings, I say, *Why do you ask?*—to give myself time to shape something we will both recognize. It is never enough time. It has been so long since I sought an answer that did not directly affect my life. Perhaps I never did. Perhaps I have always been like Kate, twin to John in time only. *What’s for dinner?* she asks, and, *Does the green striped top go with the blue plaid skirt?* I have answers for her—immediate, immutable answers. I never say, *Why do you ask?* I know where her questions come from. Today, I do not ask John why. I know where his question began. But I am careful all the same, because I do not know where it will end. I am pregnant, you see, and unhappy. I had not planned this pregnancy. In September, the twins will be in first grade. They are well-adjusted, I am told, ready for the long day to explore the world and themselves, to learn and to grow. It has not been easy fashioning whole and separate children from the fragments of these years. I don’t know if I can do it again. I don’t know if I want to do it again. I, too, am ready for the freedom of whole

days to explore the world and myself, to learn and to grow. Would John understand that?

He knows about pregnancy.

"What will Aunt Laura look like when the baby is on the outside instead of in?" he asks one day when he is barely four and we are making bread.

"Flat like she did before," I answer. "Don't you remember?"

"No," he says, "I don't remember." After a minute's thoughtful silence, he asks, "When Katie gets big, will she have babies?"

"If she wants to," I say. Then, thinking of my own six year sterility, I add, "and if all goes well."

Katie slams her dough on the breadboard. "I will not have babies! I amn't even getting married."

"Do girls have to get married to have babies?" John asks.

He doesn't know what the books say. He does not fold up, satisfied like a sunflower at nightfall, until the next time. Every question answered opens him for more.

"No," I say.

He is puzzled. "But—"

Because I fear where he will lead me, I jump in, "But it is better if they do," leading us both into the bottomless places of values and morals.

And that's where we are now.

John's question began late last night in the dark. He carried it with him into sleep. Fed by the sound of my tears, it twisted and turned, pushing its way upward until, this morning, it has surfaced. "What does abortion mean?"

How can I answer? A dictionary definition, recited mechanically, objectively, will not satisfy him. It tells only of failed design. It cannot explain the tone in his father's voice, booming out of last night's dark: "If that's the way you feel about it, have an abortion."

I try to reconstruct our conversation. It is useless. The emotion is there—my agonized tears, John's father's weary anger—distilled from the silent week of unspoken accusation. *I do not want this baby.* Did I say that last night? I have said it hundreds of times this past week without having spoken it at all. I have said it from behind the wall I have built between us. I said it most strongly late last night in the dark, when his hand, clumsy with the stranger I had become, burned my breast like ice, and I turned away. *I do not want this baby.* Accusing him, as though it were something that has been done to me against my will.

In my memory, a friend says, "No one get pregnant unless she wants to. Don't you agree?" she asks me. I agree. I am not pregnant then. But before my yes-saying, thinking of the barren times before the twins, I wonder fleetingly: *Does it work in the reverse? Was I barren because I did not want to be pregnant?* I am unhappy those six years—or think I am. I envy the women I know grown round and heavy with life. It angers me to hear them talk of ways to prevent conception. As if it were so easy to create new life!

"It's as difficult to try to have a baby," I tell them, "as it is to try not to!" They laugh, taking their cue from the lightness in my voice. Inside, I am heavy with failure.

And I remember myself at eleven. "I'm going to have four babies," I tell a neighbor's child, four years my junior. We sit on the top rung of the split rail fence that marks the end of our street.

"How do you know?" she asks.

"Because a person can decide."

"God decides," she says flatly.

Flushed with excitement, I laugh. "God has nothing to do with it. A man and a lady—they decide."

I wonder if I would have shared with her the details of my new and dangerous knowledge if her mother had not called her in. I doubt it. Knowing gives me a power that makes me heady. It is all right with me if she wants to put her life in the hands of some unknown God. I am master of my fate. And she would reject the knowledge. She is seven. I am only the girl down the street and, therefore, untrustworthy in matters of importance. John is six. I am his mother. He rejects nothing.

What happened to the girl who decided to have four babies? The woman who prayed to have one? Are they one person—the same person who, late last night in the dark, cried because a life has taken root inside her? Would abortion mean the same to them all?

It is so easy to decide to have four when there are none. It is easy to be the perfect earth mother—unselfish, open to all the possibilities of life—when there are no children. Imaginary children do not keep one up at night. Their noses never run. Their temperatures never rise. Their feet never grow. They do not have tantrums or fight with one another or ask questions their mothers cannot answer.

Things change. The world changes. People change. And words! How tricky they are—putting on different meanings for different people, changing to fit the company they keep. Perfidy-

ous words! They change as the individual who uses them changes. How can I explain that to John? I cannot even explain it to myself.

I wonder what my mother would have answered. Futile. I wouldn't have asked. The word *abortion* would not have dug into my dreams. No tears would have fed my curiosity. *One does what he has to do*, she would tell me now. Hers is the choiceless generation we pity. Accept. Be satisfied. At the moment, I envy her. Acceptance is so much easier when there is no choice. I envy, too, the women who can separate what they want from what they think they want. They would have no trouble answering John's question.

He looks at me solemnly, full of trust.

One does what he must. Get on with it.

"Remember the time you planted the sunflower seed and Dog dug it up?" I ask.

"Yes."

"Well."

His forehead is creased with the effort of putting the pieces together. He will ask me shortly what that has to do with me and why Daddy said what he said late last night in the dark. I am pregnant, I will say, and I have to make a decision. I will be calm and direct, prepared to follow his lead, answering his questions as they come.

But he doesn't ask and in the silence I study him, my beautiful, blue-eyed, one-of-a-kind son—and remember that while I carried him—long before I knew there were two lives taking shape within me—I said late one night in the dark, "I don't want this baby." Was it the baby I didn't want? Or the pregnancy? Perhaps it was only change I feared. What can I know of motives buried deep in the unconscious? There is so much on the surface I do not understand. I do know that John's being here is reason enough to have had him.

Suddenly, I say, "We're going to have a baby."

Kate's face opens. "When?" she asks, and, "Is it in your tummy? If it's a girl can she sleep in my room?" Without leaving space for my answers she dances off to see where we will put the crib.

John stands silent. He wants to smile and he wants to cry.

"How do you feel about our having a baby, John?" I ask.

His lower lip juts out. "That's the problem," he says. "I don't know how to feel."

We are more alike, John and I, than it appears. The wanting and the not wanting grow side by side in us like two blossoms

on a single stem. I reach out to him. "Oh, John," I say. "That is a problem, isn't it?"

He comes into my arms. It is so good to feel his solid, little-boy body, to smell his pungent boy-smell. It is good, too, to know that, in a minute, when we have broken our laughing-crying embrace, he will ask another question. It doesn't seem important now whether I have an answer. All that matters is that I try and go on trying.

"It's all right," I say, still holding him, savoring the sweetness of choice. "You'll have a long time to decide."

A New Place

FLORENCE WEINBERGER

The corpse on the bed is finally quiet.
Outside, spring has done deaf.
The neighbors,
faithless birds without memory,
retrieve their empty bowls.
I gather snapshots
like last winter's apples,
press letters to alien uncles,
tickets and traveling dollars
inside my passport.
Even deserting
these dusty streets, this body
that snubbed me again,
going to America,
I will stitch the sun into seams
and the needles will pierce
even bone, corrupt even blood
ablaze with blue air, frosty water,
fresh leaves growing softly
behind us, unfenced.

The Child's Room

RALPH ADAMO

The child's dark room is a timid lover.
Her father is a naked prince of copper
Hanging from two sticks on the wall. Her mother
Is ticking, ticking on the dresser.

The child is asleep inside this formless
Heart that beats as though it were the breeze
Lifting and dropping the curtain cord. She
Breathes the scents a warm night carries:

The long pines, the decomposing cat
Whose body was somewhere they could not
Find among the bushes, the fresh-cut
Grass, and roses in the rich black dirt.

This might be a mountain peak, her dark room,
In Spring when the snow and the first green
Mingle; or it might be the ocean
Floor, deep and lush and lightless as her dream.

But the child's dark room is not her lover.
The child is grown, and there beside her
Asleep is not her father or mother,
But a man who dreams he understands her.

A Strand of Wire

DAN O'BRIEN

FRAMED IN THE square lines of the farmhouse window Judith Nelson watches her husband walk. She notices the limp yet she can still see the strength. She can see the power that was important so long ago. She stands with her head up, in front of the kitchen sink. Her husband walks toward the growing bean field. The morning sky is pink and brightening in front of him. His stiff black boots push up tiny billowing clouds from the dusty lane. They are like the giant clouds that raise black in the west. Judith's hand dangles absently into the cooling dishwater. Two plates are beside the sink, the breakfast untouched, cold.

There is a numbness. Since Billy Knutson died she has known this morning would come, but she has never understood. She has listened to her husband, never saying what he meant but telling her just the same. Telling her that he was afraid. Wishing he had the money to buy the Knutson place, wondering who would have it. And worry, a terrible worry about the fence and the people who would own its other side. There would be that awful awkwardness.

The fence had belonged to the two of them, Billy Knutson and her husband, they had mended it together. Now it would be according to the law. *Face the fence, standing on your land. The half of the fence to your right is your responsibility.* There would be strangers there. Not like before. Not the Knutsons, or the Olsens, or the Johnsons. They were all gone, dead, moved, gone away. Of the old times only the river remained. And she thinks of the river, there even before her parents, constant, chewing quietly at their back pasture.

Except for the oldness, the slowness, the walk is the same. She has known it since she was a child. He leans forward, into the walk, swinging the left hand, jerking it up almost to his chest. It is the way he used to run. The same as sixty years before, wide-eyed, speaking a different language, running to the

schoolhouse, running to bring the cow, running to their own church, gone now. And thinking back she can see that even then the signs were there. This morning had been coming since then.

Billy Knutson had been the last. He would visit them, drink coffee and talk to her husband of horses that wore size ten shoes and plowed without a line. They would laugh sometimes and the sound would be funny, like from a dream. And sometimes they would drink and speak, then, the old language and they would talk about the disappointments, shake their heads at their parents' choice of land, wonder at the water whose memory forced their parents to settle beside the river. The wild, fouled, fishless river that moved, not by tides but by the twisting power of the land itself.

And that talk would make them silent. They would grip each other's forearms and shoulders. But Billy Knutson was gone. Five years now. And his farm was owned by a man they did not know. Only that he was from the east, that he had new tractors and a combine that harvested six rows at a time and that he squeezed the land for all that it was worth. She did not know him to see him but she could feel him all around them. Except for the narrow right-of-way Billy had insisted that her husband accept, they had no access to the road. They were captive there, between the river and the rusting wire fence that they shared, now, with a stranger.

Their farm had been diminishing since before she could remember. Every spring the river would claim another section of crumbling bank and even in dusty August, handfuls of topsoil washed into its rolling belly daily. Judith had watched him walking the river bank, gazing across its girth. Walking the boundaries of his land and stopping to stare at a spot in the river, remembering when he had stood there and gazed even further out to where the river boiled brown, almost thick. Then he would look up stiffly and go on. Until he came to where the river turned and where the boundary fence began, appeared rusty, ghost-like from the water. And he would turn and walk that boundary for two miles. Along the way he would pull up the sagging wires, twist the broken ends back together, make the fence stand if he could. But along its entire length, from where it appeared to where it descended again into the river, he knew that there would be hungry cattle pushing at it from the other side, straining at his corn and beans and that, as always, it would give to their weight. And once, though he never said he had, she knew that somehow he had made himself go to the neighbor's house, according to the law, and asked to share the

cost and labor of a new fence. She knew this because she had seen him return, sit in the pick-up after the engine had died, then slowly open the door, swing his feet to the graveled drive and show her his chalk-rock face, dusted with years of disappointment and now the courage spent.

So it had been five years that he had raised a crop to feed to the neighbor's cattle and each year the land growing smaller and the price of the crops he could glean from the fields getting lower and lower. Until she had told him that something must be done. She had never meant it to come out the way that it did, it had come like gas from a troubled stomach and when it was out he stared up at her from the table. His grey eyes were steady into hers and for an instant she thought that she had been wrong, that there was no trouble in his world. But she had been right, the eyes narrowed and he was forced to look away.

She lets some water out of the sink and warms what is left with hot from the spigot. Her husband is further down the lane, still sending up dust from around his feet, walking with his limp past the grown-up weeds of their grove. And hiding in those weeds is the story of the farm. Obscured from sight, laid in rows surrounded by waist-high weeds, are the rusted walking plows, the rotted harness and the discarded corn knives. One row closer are the steel seats and boilers of the days of steam, and closest to where her husband is walking are the one and two row cultivators and plows. And gasoline engines from tiny tractors that stopped running years before. Even now she knows that in the machine shed there is nothing that can turn the ground, plant the seed or harvest the crops more than three rows at a time. That, she decides, is part of the trouble. But a small part. The rest of the trouble goes deeper than even cold steel can penetrate. It has to do with flesh, with something inside that man walking away and with something that will die with him, would have died with Billy Knutson, but didn't. It crawled from the cheap wooden casket that day in November and into her husband's chest. And when he stood up from where he'd sat alone all night he carried the trouble that Billy had gathered from this land, and that which he had inherited from the others. Her husband was silent then, frightened and crippled by the burden.

Almost a year ago he brought home enough material to fix his share of the fence. Borrowed the money, she imagined, and unloaded the fifteen spools of wire and the bundles of fence posts beside the barn. The next morning he walked out to fix his half

of the fence. He walked the same direction that he is walking now but in a different way. He had carried the posts and wire with him, struggled with them and she had seen that the load was too much for him. But she had been able to look down at the dishwater. This morning, his load was lighter. The wooden butt of his rifle slapped against his lame leg with every step and for the second time she notices that the water is going cold.

He had fixed his share of the fence, from the river to the center of the boundary. He worked alone, for three weeks, steady. When it was finished he waited for the spring which came that year as always, overdue, yet catching everyone unprepared. And when he went to the fields the neighbor's fence was still rusty, tumbled down. He said nothing. He plowed his land and planted it and watched his crops grow up as fast as the neighbor's pasture was grazed down.

He would stand at the end of the lane where he is standing now, watch across the field to where the cattle strained at the fence, stretching their bulky heads over and reaching for the pollinating bean plants. In the last days of September, when it seemed the fence could hold them no more, he would wake up before light, stand in the kitchen and stare into the darkness. Finally he would walk out to meet the morning and chase the cattle away from the fence, save his crops for another day.

And yesterday he stood out where he is standing now, watching the dusty pasture on the other side of the fence that could not interest the cattle for one day more. By morning the cattle would be grazing in his beans as they had done every year since Billy Knutson had died. And so that night the rifle came out from behind the door and at the kitchen table he sat wiping the barrel and sliding the oiled bolt in and out. But it was not the rifle that troubled Judith. It was the silence. All that evening before and early, hours before sunrise this morning, there was silence. Not that it was different, there were never many words, but this morning in the darkened kitchen the old times lay thick on the counter and oozed out from around the cupboard doors.

When she awoke he was back at the kitchen table and she could hear that he was talking, a conversation. But when she came into the kitchen he was silent. And the bacon sizzled in the pan, moved to the table and grew cast iron cold on the plates in front of them. There were no words. Just the pale brightening kitchen walls and her husband, slumped forward, pushing at the bacon with his fork.

When there was light enough to see he took the rifle from

the corner where he had left it shining clean and slowly pushed shells into the magazine. They made a scraping sound and Judith brought the dishes to where they are stacked now, beside the sink below the white framed window. And from that window she watches the rifle come up to her husband's shoulder, sees the first puff of smoke and the bellow and the crack from the rifle reach her ears at the same time. She feels frightened, helpless and yet she holds her head up watching and listening to the death of the second and third cows and suddenly she knows what her husband has known since the beginning. She knows the coolness of his grey eyes, the steadiness of his hand in the half light, sliding the cartridges into the rifle. She too is standing at the end of the lane, and she realizes what he would have said, had he spoken at all.

Excerpts From Noah's Log

GREGORY DJANIKIAN

Three days, and we're still not serious: my wife mutters about sheep fouling her linen; my sons complain of too much work, their wives of a lack of neighbors. All day the incessant rumblings. All day, the rain.

Two weeks: outside, what still can breathe, breathes water. Tonight, I hold my wife to my heart, fearing her loss: so many has the sea reclaimed! The weather worsens. We pray in each other's arms for morning.

One month. I sleep in terror like a child alone, and dream of a landscape growing less familiar, and of how, before I've risen to the morning's rain, something else loved will have gone quietly under.

The fortieth night. We move to the edge of darkness, and our lives grow still in the cradle of the sea's embrace.

Gently Unbending

LINDA TY-CASPER

MY PARENTS' house seemed to lean, not in any fixed direction, but towards wherever I stood. Neither paint nor new sashes shored it up, to keep it from looking old. The green and white tiles on the stone steps had faded and the eaves were peeling, as if the wood was becoming porous in preparation for its collapse.

"Look, tell them I'm late now, but when I come to pick you up this afternoon . . . around three . . . I'll come in then and kiss their hands. Okay?" My husband called through the car window, taking leave of me at the gate. Ben had been summoned to Manila to explain why his company's competitor was outselling them in the area. All he talked about, from the time we left Lingayen, was the competitor's scheme of saturation selling: their teams descended on each town, leaving samples; returned within the week to make sales.

"Okay," I said, looking away. If he had agreed to live in that house, my father would have kept it up. "Okay." I faced the house once more, trying to be free of Teresa who was grabbing my face to kiss. Because she was still teething, wherever her face touched mine, she left spit.

My mother saw us at once. She walked to the gate, not at all surprised though we were coming unannounced. She looked older to me, now that she had retired from teaching. There was a certain aimlessness in the way she moved towards us, as if she did not want to reach us too soon. I let her take Teresa. At once the child was attracted to the curlers in my mother's hair and tried to lick them.

With a book in his hand, my father came out in time to see the car turn the far corner. I repeated what Ben had said about coming in later, but my father wanted to know only how long we were staying. When I said, "Just for the day," he asked how long it had taken to drive in from Lingayen. There were some people there that he knew but he did not ask about them.

"Where's Tia Ana?" I asked once we entered the porch. I could see where the new bookcases had been built, lining the inner wall. The volumes were dusted and shiny crimson. Silverfish had not had time to eat away the gold letterings.

"Your aunt's in the kitchen," my mother answered, sitting down with Teresa facing away from her. "Better not go in to see her yet or lunch will be delayed. Time means nothing to her, you know." Her voice fixed me where I stood.

Obediently I sat down beside the pots of begonia that were tumbling out of their containers, the pink flowers in hidden clusters, their leaves spiked and glossy. There we talked about things as they came to our minds: about the possibility that Ben would be transferred to Manila and our not being so far apart any more. My mother thought it was time Ben was promoted to manager after four years of being provincial agent. My father did not ask about the possibility of our living in that house when Ben was transferred. He had asked about that once. I guess he thought our plans had not changed about building our own house.

My mother thought that Teresa was thin, although the black coral bracelets she had given the child were tight on her arms like twisting tendrils. Her talk went back to the time I was a little girl in that house. She said I was hard to please, that I fussed and needed attention all the time. She was the only one who recognized my features in Teresa.

From time to time, my father glanced at the book in his hand. He had, my mother explained with a hint of resentment, bought a set of Harvard Classics with part of his retirement check. I knew that, by rereading Wordsworth and Longfellow, my father was remembering his own childhood. When we were small he could recite to us, entire, long passages he had learned in school which we were trying, in our turn, so hard to memorize. I watched him now, with the book open on his lap, reciting the lines half aloud as he looked through the windows at the golden shower tree, a mass of yellow against the April sky. I watched what he was watching: the petals falling, gently bending the light.

After we had talked for a while, my mother insisted that I rest in my room. "The bed is made," she said. "No one uses it now."

I wanted to go to Tia Ana first, somehow feeling that until I saw her I had not reached home. But I had to wait until it was time to eat, or my mother would think that I loved my aunt more than I loved her. There were positions we had to observe

in that house, ranks and rituals of precedence that locked us in place, so that getting closer to one person meant breaking away from another.

When I was alone in my room, I felt like an intruder. I could not recognize myself in the framed picture of a little girl dressed as a *sampaguita* in green and white crepe, or in the grown one with lipstick, whose neck in a graduation gown was longer than long. I closed my eyes to the walls, and wondered if Tia Ana had heard us come. She would be hurt if I did not come to her at once. The hurt would build up inside her, merge with the other remembered slights, until grown too massive for her heart to bear, they would make her cry out and want to leave. She always acted like a stranger in that house . . .

AS FAR BACK as I can remember, the cooking at our house was done by Tia Ana. When there was no one else to do the cleaning and washing, she did those, too. However, she was always willing to let another take those chores over, but never the cooking to which she devoted many hours each day, starting the next meal even while we were still eating.

When my mother was home from school, she never failed to complain that Tia Ana took so long cooking. On Sundays when relatives came or when my parents had visitors and my mother wanted to try new sauces, Tia Ana still refused to share the kitchen. Offended, thinking we thought she was not good enough to cook for visitors, Tia Ana would keep closer to whatever she was doing, looking no further than a fixed arc which did not include anyone beyond an arm's length from her. She did not work any faster either. Only when the strips of potatoes matched end to end on the cuttingboard, did she begin to dice. My mother insisted that it made no difference if the potato salad yielded an occasional odd carrot or irregular beet; but Tia Ana considered that would be a grave lapse on her part.

While she worked, sometimes, Tia Ana wore a smile; but it never made her look happy, only uncertain; as if though she had mixed the batter herself, she was not sure the *lumpia* wrappers would hold. They had to be very thin and rounded perfectly. To form them that way she had to stand before a large wok, heated just right, and with her right hand spread the ball of dough lightly, just enough to stick; immediately her left hand had to lift the almost transparent shape before it could brown, drop it on a plate and wipe the wok clean with an

oiled cloth so her right hand could spread the dough again. It was her great achievement. She felt insulted when visitors asked where she had bought the wrappers. Knowing her one pride and sensitivity, relatives assured her that not even in the best restaurants of Manila were there *lumpia* wrappers as good as hers.

My mother never understood why Tia Ana insisted on her own way of doing things even for the servants. "Education," my mother explained, "is to make us see that there are as many different ways of doing things as there are people." It was a source of their constant dispute. Tia Ana never stayed to answer my mother's charges. She merely went up to her room while my mother got angry all by herself.

Tia Ana always looked chastised, too. My father said that there was really no point in blaming her for anything, for she had already done that to herself.

After the meal was prepared, Tia Ana would sit at her stool in the kitchen—she never rested her back—while we would sit down to eat in the adjoining room. No amount of coaxing would make her eat with us. She was tired, she would say; or, she would come in after a while to join us; but she never did. When we were all through, she would come in to eat what was left. She never refilled the platters though there was more in the pot.

"She's trying to make me look mean," my mother often said, her face brittle with anger. "As if I refused to let my sister eat with us. It's good that God sees everything." When she felt particularly peeved and, also, wicked, my mother would add aloud, "Anyway, those who do the cooking never get hungry."

Although she had borne the comment countless times before, one Sunday Tia Ana suddenly rose from her stool and walked stiffly to her room. I knew she was hurt because she did not look at anyone as she passed, her sight restricted by her glasses and her pride. The silence she left was quickly broken by my mother.

"Let her," my mother said, watching what I would do. "Let her go to her rich relatives and see if they don't take advantage of her." Even my mother's hands were angry. They fumbled with the belt of her housedress.

The threat frightened me. I began to see Tia Ana being mistreated in the large house that, sometimes, we visited: she was tied to a bed or her slippers were taken from her so she could not walk. Tia Ana's feet were easily bruised, so she had to wear velvet *corchos*. In her mother's house, Tia Ana always knelt on a pillow during the evening prayers; and, sometimes, her mother would place a layer of cotton on the slippers to soften the satin.

My mother, usually, had more to say. "She cooks for me but I don't treat her like one of the help. She's not required to lift a finger in this house, as she would be in any other. If she thinks she can make me go up and beg her to stay . . ." My mother had stopped eating. Her whole body was angry; she kept tying and untying her belt. The thickening of her voice was ominous.

I wanted to tell her that Tia Ana was merely tired and her going up was not a response to my mother's remark; but my mother would think I was siding with Tia Ana.

"I don't give her money regularly because I can't. And if I did, what would distinguish her from the help? And don't tell me that Mother left her nothing! Besides, I give her on her birthdays and on Christmas. I buy her whatever she needs. She has only to ask. There, aren't you the one who gives her the money from me?"

I nodded as quickly as I could but that failed to appease my mother.

"If she gets sick, won't I take her to the best hospital? For myself, I'll be satisfied with a small room, double occupancy. But she'll complain she's on charity unless she has the best room."

My father withdrew to his plate. He himself never raised his voice, except in laughter. "Enough," he said gently, "we have neighbors." The rice was getting cold on his plate. "She'll hear," he added, motioning my brother to close the door.

It was not what my mother wanted. She became more upset. "Let her hear. Why must I be afraid to be heard saying the truth in my own house?"

My brother continued to eat. Though he was older than I, his face was innocent of what was being said at the table. Though it was Tia Ana who heated the water for his bath and had his clothes ready in the morning and gave him money for ice cream after school, he showed no particular feeling for her.

I stopped chewing, trying to think of a way to spit out the food I could not swallow, when my slipper fell. This caught my mother's attention just as I was about to slide down to retrieve it.

"You'll sit there until you've finished everything on your plate. Look at her. She thinks I'm mistreating Ana. That's what my sister has done to me, turned my own child against me. She thinks that because Ana gives her a bath and puts her to sleep, that Ana loves her more than I do, is capable of loving her more than I do. And that martyr upstairs makes herself look starved

so people will say I mistreat her. *Haber*. Any sane person can see through her deceit. But people like to be fooled. Look, even my own child would light a candle to Ana as though to a saint."

"Don't take it out on the children," my father said. "They understand none of your bitterness, not even what they see. If you want to cook, just tell Ana you'll cook from now on." My father winked at me when I looked up, I think to mean that I must accept my mother's anger—she did not love me less because she got angry—because it was her one fault and consolation.

My mother pushed away her plate to be able to anchor herself better at the table. Large veins appeared down her throat and throbbed in her inner arm. "The few times she allowed me to cook—and note that *I* have to get *her* permission to cook in *my* own house—I kept tasting the food so I didn't get hungry. That's what I mean when I said cooks never get hungry. And as far as I'm concerned, she can eat the best parts." She looked at me quickly. "And don't I know she does?"

"Your sister doesn't even taste what she cooks," my father tried to make my mother smile. "Her *sinigang* is either too salty or tasteless. At least in a restaurant I can refuse to eat what is served. But in this house!" My father looked at me again to see if he had made me smile.

"See." My mother turned gaily to my father. "You feel the way I do. Why did you keep me from speaking, then?" She felt better and started to eat again, calling for warm broth. "The world is the way it is because people are afraid to speak the truth."

Everything would have ended there had not the maid taken the opportunity to avenge Tia Ana's strictness. "I think the rest is being saved for supper." It never was, because my father disliked eating the same food twice in a day.

"Fill these platters right now or you'll leave this house before that woman does." My mother dropped her spoon on her plate to call attention to her anger. "I've had enough for one day." She listened for sounds of Tia Ana coming back. "Do you know what Ana intends to do? Embarrass me! She'll go to Ester who wants Ana in her house to take care of her children while she plays mahjong all day. Anything that maligns me pleases Ester who will encourage Ana's tale, adding here and subtracting there. Of course relatives will all be nice to her because they want to use her. The minute she can no longer work . . . *Haber!* As quick as lightning they'll pack her off to the Retiros."

My other slipper fell while I listened intently, following Tia Ana's progress from one relative's house to another, until old and useless, she ended in the home for the aged without relatives.

"If she expects me to send you up there to beg her to stay, she'll wait until the crow turns white. What sacrifice does she think she's making for me that I cannot do for myself? She won't leave me helpless. I can do housework." My mother stared at the newly replenished platters, her appetite gone.

This remark amused my father and he reached for a piece of chicken. How could my mother look after the house and teach, too?

My mother, however, did not relent, and refused to have lunch brought up to Tia Ana. "She has food stacked in her room. Whatever I bring home, she's in charge of keeping." Or to have her called down to eat. "Only the deaf have to be called."

After my mother went to her room with the unread portion of the Sunday newspaper, my father went to the porch to digest his meal in peace and my brother went to the *santol* tree in back of the house to practise with his slingshot on the small forming fruit. Left alone in the kitchen I moved to the large chair where I took my naps after school.

I must have fallen asleep for soon I could see my doll walking towards the door on its soft legs, wobbling. I watched for a while; then, when it started to fall, I raised a hand to reach it. My arm hit the chair; my eyes cleared.

It was Tia Ana standing at the door. She had on the black dress she wore for going out. Her face was speckled with the same talcum she used to powder my face and neck.

"Tia Ana," I said, "where are you going?" There was a small woven bag on the floor beside the door; her hair was covered by a bandanna with small unseen flowers. I walked up to her. "Don't leave us," I said. "Don't go." My face reached up to her waist.

She was only waiting for me to speak so she could start crying. Her tears fell on my face, on my neck. I continued to watch her crying break her face into many parts.

"Don't go. You have no place to go. They'll only fool you, Tia Ana. They'll pretend they love you . . ." I locked both arms around her body, squeezing the way I tightly squeezed my doll whenever I was afraid she was dying.

The maid would not leave us alone. "Eat first, Tia Ana. You might collapse in the street with nothing in your stomach. I left some *pochero* in the pot and saved some eggplant relish

for you." She really wanted Tia Ana to leave so she could try to be our mother when no one else was home.

"Stay with us, Tia Ana. You promised to make more dresses for my doll so people won't think she's poor; you promised . . ."

Tia Ana did not move. "I can't stay where no one wants me. If Ester has no place for me, there is Mameng. I can go anywhere. I can always work . . ." She staggered under the force of my arms that would not let her say those things. She appeared to grow weak. She had not eaten since her breakfast of coffee and *pan de sal*. "I never thought it would come to this. After what I've done for all of you, I'm made to go."

"But no one wants you to go. No one says you have to go." I was not certain this was true. My mother said many things.

"What does she mean that the cook never gets hungry? That I eat when no one is looking? I've never deceived anyone and, at my age, would I start now?"

I shook my head. The braids Tia Ana combed that morning were weights I could not easily spring. "No." Anyone could see that there was only enough flesh on Tia Ana's bones to cover them, only enough to be able to breathe. Even her narrow dress was loose. I tugged at her.

"Let me go. You only say you love me; but when your mother asks you to choose between us, I know whom you'll choose." She cried again, as forcefully as when she began, and she had to loosen my hands to be able to sit down and look inside her pockets for a handkerchief. I could not offer her the one she had pinned to my dress for I was not supposed to soil it. "The money she says she gives me, don't I spend it on her children and add to the food now that everything costs more than she lists down? I feel hurt when she looks into the market basket and asks, 'Is that all you were able to buy?' As if I pocket the rest of the money." Tia Ana sobbed, blowing into the handkerchief. Her face looked gray and cold.

"The truth is that before our mother died, she told me to stay here and look after you and your brother, so servants cannot mistreat you in your parents' absence. I was sewing then." She saw that one of my braids had become loose and she turned me around to fix it. "In those days, cuffs and necklines involved complicated turning and cutting, but not one of the dresses I made was ever returned to be made over again. The owner would not let me go to live with you. I lived with her then and did all the cooking, taking no extra wages for the chore. She treated me like a sister. If it weren't for you, I'd have

left this house long ago. I own nothing here. The maids don't listen to me because I don't pay their wages. I am nothing. Nothing." Her breath became tangled in her crying.

"How can you sew again, Tia?" The maid stayed around, listening for things to tell my mother. "How can you sew when you can no longer thread a needle?" Amused by her observation, she waited for an answer.

Tia Ana ignored the maid and pulled my arm gently. "Do I ask your mother for anything? When I ask her to buy me a toothbrush, I offer to pay for it. And isn't it the truth that she accepts the money from me, her sister," Tia Ana folded the wet parts of her handkerchief together. The bandanna had shifted but she did not pull it back in place. Some of the powder had come off her face, so that it looked swollen in parts.

I said nothing, burdened with Tia Ana's sorrow at having to pay for her own toothbrush. I would not have taken the money from her. "I have some coins. I'll give them to you."

She did not hear what I said. "That's why I want to leave now while I can still earn a little. I don't want, after I'm dead, to have anyone, not even my sister, say she had to spend for my funeral. I don't need an elaborate one. I have no friends left to impress. Just a hole in the ground, a simple mat, and a priest to bless it . . . I have not sinned much . . ." She stared at the floor. For a long while she did not speak or move. Then suddenly, in a voice that could cut the light, she cried and fell, "God why do you let them do this to me?"

I saw her fall, her face struck and silent. I dropped down beside her while the maid's shriek pierced the room again and again.

My father came running and, with my brother, picked up Tia Ana from the cold tiles and took her to her bed. She lay stiffly, the bandanna caught behind her ears, the dropped mosquito netting on her bed producing the appearance of light under covering glass. I was certain she no longer breathed.

"Shall I call the doctor?" My father sought my mother who remained in her room. I could hear them through the wall.

"Can't you see she's just acting? I knew she couldn't leave and she knew that, too. She has no place to go. She has only made me look heartless to my own child. See where the girl is."

I stayed with Tia Ana for a long time, resting my doll beside her on the bed, promising that when I grew up I would take her with me, so no one would fight with her any more.

It happened again, several times. The same words were said; the same bitterness divided the sisters. Always Tia Ana

collapsed before she could reach the door. It took her longer and longer to come out of her room afterwards.

"Are you resting?" My mother came into my room. "I've rocked Teresa to sleep and the child is resting on my bed."

I lifted myself up on one elbow to look at her. The last time I was home, she had asked if I would leave Teresa there for a few days, until Ben's next trip.

This time she spoke of Tia Ana. "It's only this morning that your aunt left her room. I don't know why I deserve to be treated the way my sister treats me, in my own house. But I suppose that we all have a cross to bear in this life, that Ana is mine."

I did not know what to say. I had gained in years but not in the wisdom to understand why I must continue to choose between them.

"Well, I just wanted to let you know how things are. Better rest a bit more. I'll look after Teresa when she wakes up." She stood at the doorway pulling her housedress tighter about her body, expecting a welcome.

I could only remain where I was, silent when I knew I should have asked her to sit down on my bed. I should have said something to indicate that, somehow, she had finally reached my conscience.

When it was time to eat I brought Teresa down to Tia Ana in the kitchen. I looked hard at my aunt after kissing her hand. She had stopped growing old. Only in the uncertain way in which she held her head to look up at me did she betray that she was approaching eighty.

She held out both hands for Teresa. I hesitated, afraid she might not be able to hold the child. But she continued to reach out, saying she would sew a dress for her, so I placed Teresa on her lap and hovered over both of them.

The maid, a different one, laughed aloud. "How can you sew a dress when you can't thread needles any more, Tia? I mend for you now."

Tia Ana did not choose to hear. Her fingers, like roots, gripped Teresa firmly while she looked over the child, bringing her own face to the sticky tongue. The two of them were soon sniffing each other, rocking together in the large kitchen chair in which I had slept as a child.

"Come, the food is getting cold," my mother called from the table. "Tell the maid to take Teresa and feed her."

"When will you come to visit us?" I asked Tia Ana quickly in case I did not get a chance to speak to her again. "We have

a room for you." I placed a paper bill, folded small, inside her dress pocket. "Buy what you want, Tia," I whispered while I took the child to give to the maid.

"One of these days," she said, "You'll just see me at your door." Nothing indicated that she had felt my hand inside her pocket. "Go and eat."

I went to the table where my parents waited. There were several platters of food, as if Tia Ana had known I was coming.

"She still cooks for a crowd, though people don't come any more, not even your rich brother who lives only across the river." My mother heaped my plate with the best parts of the chicken. "I keep telling her to cook only half portions, but will she listen? It's like talking to a statue. I don't get an answer."

"Not any more, please," I said. "I'll take more later." She had placed on my plate enough for both my brother and myself.

"Call her." My mother looked at me directly, as if to challenge me. "See if she'll eat with us now that you're here."

I looked up quickly at my father who winked at me. He had not lost his patience. Without him, I realized, that house would have collapsed long ago.

I called but not loud enough to be heard. I knew Tia Ana would not come.

She continued to sit in the large chair in the kitchen, side by side with the soft rag doll I used to have.

They both looked asleep when it was time to leave, so I did not try to wake her up. Ben thought it was capricious of me not to let Tia Ana know we were leaving or, at least, that he had come."

"But she's asleep," I said. "Next time."

"When?" Ben was too young yet to be patient; too sure of his life to understand without explanations. He walked ahead, offended by my stubbornness, carrying the sleeping Teresa to the car.

I waved to the window though I could not see clearly who stood there watching. As I crossed the gate I looked back quickly at the house where we—my mother and father, my brother, my Tia Ana—had lived together for a long time: and I wondered why I should remember only what we had suffered there; why I should feel as if it was I, I, who had fought with Tia Ana in that house.

Marginalia . . .

(continued)

and anger on their "favorite team." And the people who are now sitting in front of a television watching baseball every Sunday afternoon used to go out and watch their local sandlot team with a degree of involvement not possible in the cavernous remoteness of today's major league stadiums.

Television didn't do the movies any good either. There was something to be said for Saturday or Sunday afternoon at the movies in the days when you saw Movietone News, selected short subjects, the weekly serial, and the feature—all for eleven cents. (A penny tax!) There is no communal experience today to rival the camaraderie of those Saturday afternoons. Certainly the lonely vigil enacted by kids watching the Saturday morning kids' shows on TV will never compare.

Television, the electronic pacifier, has made recreation easy, passive, and largely mindless. It is always there, waiting to produce instant entertainment at the flick of a switch. There is no need to invent things to do. Perhaps that is why I never see kids playing on the street during the long summer evenings, playing games like Hide and Go Seek, Red Light, Babies in the Air, Red Rover, One Potato Two Potato, and Hop Scotch. And when darkness ended the games, maybe you could go to the drug store soda fountain and buy an ice cream cone with the dime you'd gotten by taking back empty bottles to the store. The corner drug store fountain is a rarity now; the ten cent ice cream cone is now about seventy-five cents and loose ice cream is hard to find unless you can locate a chain ice cream store; and the no-deposit bottle has ruined not only the ecology but the economy of enterprising youngsters.

The soda fountain itself generated things to do. You could experiment with such exotic confections as the lemon phosphate, the cherry Coke, and the root beer milkshake. Or you could just socialize, spinning slowly on your stool, sipping through two straws, and eyeing the girls who came to the drugstore to buy a movie magazine and eye the boys. If your eye and her eye happened to meet, and you had your nerve about you, you might even propose walking her home, hoping you and she could sit on the glider on her porch until her father turned the porch light on. If all this begins to sound like an episode of "The Waltons," I apologize, but I can't help wondering what folk rituals of today have taken the place of the soda fountain and the porch glider.

The lack of money was a great stimulus for invention when

I was a kid. We built things. We had a pile of scrap lumber in the back yard and we used it to build "bunks," make-shift housing for our club (whose membership changed daily as a result of quarrels over building techniques). With a two-by-four and an orange crate and a skate, we built remarkably noisy scooters known in our neighborhood as "skatemobiles," in others as "skatos." With wheels from a baby carriage and a few boxes, we built soapbox racers, certain that they would win the Soapbox Derby. I'm sorry my kids have never known the pride of owning a skatemobile and decorating it for the Fourth of July.

But I don't miss a lot of things that aren't around much any more. I don't miss the variety of nostrums employed by mothers to "give you a good cleaning out," like milk of magnesia, citrate of magnesia, mineral oil, and—most dreaded of all—castor oil. (You went with your mother to the drug store where the druggist whipped up a batch and disguised it in rootbeer.) I don't miss the bubble gum cards called WAR! which featured bloody pictures of Chinese and Japanese slaughtering one another. Nor do I miss air raid wardens and civil defense drills. And I certainly do not miss draft notices that began with "Greetings" and ended with the disruption of a family.

But I pity those of you who have not known penny candy, splinter-filled chunks of ice stolen from the ice man's truck on a summer day, Big Little Books, Jack Armstrong and the prizes in the Wheaties boxes, or a ride in a rumble seat. You'll have to manufacture your own nostalgia; it's easy, once you get going.

Contributors

H. E. FRANCIS has been a regular contributor to this magazine for the past 24 years. A previous winner of the Iowa Award for Short Fiction, he was honored last year by having his story, "A Chronicle of Love," selected for the O. Henry Awards, the Martha Foley collection, and the Pushcart Prize volume. PHILIP K. JASON teaches at the U.S. Naval Academy. His poems have appeared in recent issues of *Kansas Quarterly*, *Back Door*, and the *Remington Review*. He has edited a special issue of *Dryad*—a collection of new poems in traditional prosodies—that will appear in the spring. CAROL ADORJAN, whose stories have appeared here before, had several of her radio plays aired by the Chicago Radio Theater last year, in addition to stories published in the *North American Review* and *Redbook*. FLORENCE WEINBERGER is making her second appearance in these pages. She lives in Encino, California. GREGORY DJANIKIAN studied under Daniel Hoffman at Pennsylvania, took a Master's in Creative Writing at Syracuse, and is currently poet/teacher in the New York State Poets-in-the-Schools program. RALPH ADAMO's poems have appeared in magazines and anthologies in the United States, Canada, and Germany. His books are *The Tiger Who Spoke French and Other Poems* (Orleans Press, 1972) and *Why We Have Friends* (Protopod Foundation, 1975). DAN O'BRIEN is a resident writer for the South Dakota Arts Council. His work has appeared in the *Wisconsin Review*, the *Michigan Quarterly* and elsewhere. "A Strand of Wire" has already been selected for inclusion in the anthology, *Itinerary*, published by Bowling Green University. LINDA TY-CASPER has had a novel and two collections of stories published in Manila. She now lives in Massachusetts, where she was a Radcliffe Institute Fellow while doing research for a second historical novel. Her short fiction has appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Triquarterly*, *Southwest Review*, *New Mexico Quarterly*, and the *University of Windsor Review*.

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